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ABSTRACT

Liberal arts approaches to university education and many theories of counseling share as a goal the development of critical thinking in the individuals served. Such thinking requires the ability to consider the context within which one is working and the context within which the events and ideas under consideration occur. William Perry has described a sequence of development in university students which suggests that this ability is rare prior to the final years of university. According to the Perry model younger university students assimilate educational and other life experiences to a dualistic (right, wrong; true, false; etc.) world view, only gradually progressing to a relativistic view. The paper includes a review of recent research designed to evaluate the generality of the stages Perry observed. For the most part this research supports the early stages but not later ones. These later stages involve learning to deal with contradictions among various aspects of one's self. Others have dealt with a similar idea under the labels "dialectical logic" and "dialectical operations" (e.g., Basseches, Pascual-Leone) and agree that Perry is expecting dialectial thinking too early in adult development. A variety of stage theories of adult development of self will be reviewed in order to place Perry in this broader context. From this context curricula and counseling strategies which have recently been proposed on the basis of the Perry model will be evaluated. Emphasis will be placed on attempts to teach the process rather than particular products of thinking. (Author)

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W. G. Perry's Model of Intellectual and Ethical Development: Implications of Recent Research for the Education and Counseling of Young Adults

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Abstract

Liberal arts approaches to university education and many theories of counseling share as a goal the development of critical thinking in the individuals served. Such thinking requires the ability to consider the context within which one is working and the context within which the events and ideas under consideration occur. William Perry has described a sequence of development in university students which suggests that this ability is rare prior to the final years of university. According to the Perry model younger university students assimilate educational and other life experiences to a dualistic (right, wrong; true, false; etc.) world view, only gradually progressing to a relativistic view. The paper includes a review of recent research designed to evaluate the generality of the stages Perry observed. For the most part this research supports the early stages but not later ones. These later stages involve learning to deal with contradictions among various aspects of one's self. Others have dealt with a similar idea under the labels "dialectical logic" and "dialectical operations" (e.g., Basseches, Pascual-Leone) and agree that Perry is expecting dialectical thinking too early in adult development. A variety of stage theories of adult development of self will be reviewed in order to place Perry in this broader context. From this context curricula and counseling strategies which have recently been proposed on the basis of the Perry model will be evaluated. Emphasis will be placed on attempts to teach the process rather than particular products of thinking.

W. G. Perry's Model of Intellectual and Ethical Development: Implications of Recent Research for the Education and Counseling of Young Adults

Models of adult intellectual and personality development have burgeoned in the last few decades. Although these models have focused on different aspects of the individual's development, the processes described by many are similar in that the individual is seen as progressing towards increasingly differentiated and complex ways of conceptualizing the world. William G. Perry has proposed such a model focusing on the intellectual and ethical development of the university student.

Perry's Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years has prompted many theorists to examine the utility of his developmental scheme as a guide both for counseling (Gordon, 1981; Knefelkamp & Slepitza, 1976; Knefelkamp, Widick, & Stroad, 1976; Widick, 1977) and for higher education (Stephenson & Hunt, 1977; Touchton, Wertheimer, Cornfeld, & Harrison, 1977; Widick, 1977; Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1975). This dual usage should not be surprising in light of the shared purpose of many counselors and liberal educators--to promote individual development. For example, Sanford (1967) argues that higher education should "promote an identity based on such qualities as flexibility, creativity, openness to experience, and responsibility" (p. 9). Wegener (1978) argues that higher education should develop processes that increase the student's

"range and subtlety of . . . effective responses to objects and [ideas]" (p. 98). These same qualities are prominent in the higher levels of such theories as Erickson's (1964) identity development, Loevinger's (1976) ego development, and Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder's (1961) development of cognitive complexity. Similarly, counseling theorists such as Rogers (1980), Kelly (1955), Lazarus (1971), and Beck (1976) have stressed these attributes in their definitions of a well-functioning individual, and as such, in the goals of counseling. Knefelkamp (1980) notes the parallel goals of teachers and counselors as follows:

> The facilitation of human beings who can reason as well as read; who possess insight as well as knowledge; who have the capacity for empathy and ethical conduct; who recognize, appreciate, and are not threatened by individual differences; and who have developed the interpersonal skills and thinking processes necessary for living in a complex and diverse society. (p. 12)

Practitioners seeking to promote growth in the direction of such goals need a model of development. Perry (1968) does not provide a general model encompassing all of the goals of individual development. Rather his model focuses on the ability to appreciate and utilize relativism in interaction with the world. However, the recognition of the conceptual relativism of all knowledge and the transformation in intellectual and ethical thinking which ensues may be prerequisite to the full development

of such qualities as flexibility, creativity, openness to experience, and critical thinking. Thus the relative simplicity of focusing on a single dimension and the centrality of that dimension have made Perry's model attractive to practitioners. Details of the Perry model will be reviewed here only briefly. An outline of the positions in the model is provided in the appendix.

Description of the Model Positions

Perry was initially drawn by the diversity he found in student's perceptions of the pluralistic academic environment and their experiences in it. His model emerged from unstructured interviews he and his colleagues conducted with Harvard undergraduates between 1954 and 1963. As the same students returned to discuss their experiences from their freshman to their senior year it became apparent that their reinterpretations of their lives followed a regular sequence. Thus, his model describes intellectual development as occurring in a sequence of hierarchical positions in which each position represents a qualitatively different structure for construing knowledge. There are nine positions and these can be grouped into three broader categories: dualism, relativism, and commitment in relativism. In general the progression is from a categorical view of knowledge and values to a complex, pluralistic perspective within which one has a guiding sense of self.

The first three positions represent a dualistic view of

knowledge from which the learning process is regarded as externalized. Individuals at these positions tend to look for knowledge and truth outside of themselves; they view their role in the learning process as that of a receiver. Positions four, five, and six describe the movement towards a relativistic perspective. Uncertainty and contradiction with respect to knowledge and ideas are recognized as legitimate. The hallmark of this stage is the developing awareness of the contextual nature of knowledge and truth. According to Perry growth through these positions is also manifested in the increased capacity to think abstractly, to reflect on one's own thoughts, to empathize with others and to understand different perspectives. This major conceptual shift is often accompanied by an upheaval in identity issues, as the individual ponders his/her role in a relativistic world. Growth at this position seems to involve an awareness of the need for commitment.

The final three positions describe the unfolding of personal responsibilities and commitments through individual actions and the ensuing consequences of those actions. Hence, initial affirmations of one's identity such as commitments to an area of study, career, friends, or a spouse, each differing in their particulars, are accumulated and repeated until a fuller affirmation of one's identity is realized and manifested not only in one's actions but in one's approach to life. The assumption that knowledge is relativistic remains; however, the dialectical

nature of this knowledge is realized. Perry describes a "balance" which is achieved in the final position of his scheme, as the many paradoxes and roles in one's life become synthesized, or "embraced and somehow transcended" (Perry, 1981, p. 96).

Perry's scheme has received a great deal of attention in recent years (e.g., Gordon, 1981; Knefelkamp & Slepitza, 1976; Murphy & Gilligan, 1980; Stephenson & Hunt, 1977; Widick, 1977). Research efforts have included validity studies in university settings and educational interventions aimed at enhancing movement through the hierarchy (Brabeck, 1983; Stephenson & Hunt, 1977; Touchton, Wertheimer, Cornfeld, & Harrison, 1977; Widick, Knefelkamp, & Parker, 1975). However, Perry's model of development has also been used as a framework for career counseling (Knefelkamp & Slepitza, 1976; Welfel, 1982) and for counseling women with respect to the role of women in society (Widick, Knefelkamp, & Stroad, 1976).

As indicated above the utilization of Perry's model in both educational and counseling practice stems from a common concern of the two disciplines--growth of the individual and the enhancement of his/her full potentialities. The hope of the practitioners is that Perry has isolated a central dimension of the development process in young adults. If he has, then his scheme of development may become a useful tool for helping the educator and the counselor conceptualize the dynamics and problems of their students/clients. Certainly comments of the

sort which are judged indicative of the lower positions of the model sound very familiar to the experienced educator or clinician. How often have teachers heard perplexed students complain: ". . . on the test I never know exactly wh[illegible] he instructor wants . . . no matter what I study he always seems to be looking for something else"; or, "Teachers should teach what they know. Sometimes when you ask a question, teachers will answer you . . . but they won't really tell you. . . .". Such comments denote a passive, externally oriented approach to the learning process, and a perception of knowledge as predominantly quantitative and absolute. They echo the sentiments of the dualistic individual. Similarly, the counselor is often confronted with clients who want the "expert" (the therapist) to tell them "what is the matter" with them, what needs to be done to solve "the problem," or to tell them how best to handle their child, spouse, future, and so forth. These clients approach the counseling process much in the way most consumers bring their automobiles to be "fixed": knowledge, or the solution to one's problems is regarded as outside oneself, and there is perceived to be one "right way" for alleviating the problems in life.

Development Through Support and Challenge

Development is the interesting aspect of Perry's model--it predicts change in these characteristic ways one conceptualizes knowledge and construes meaning. This is in opposition to the typology models carried implicitly by many educators, and to the

notion of cognitive or learning styles. Such models imply a permanence which in turn suggests an educational strategy of matching the curriculum delivery to the learning style of the student. Practitioners interested in Perry's model suggest moving beyond matching to some form of developmental instruction--instruction designed to promote progress through the nine positions. Published accounts of attempts to promote growth typically mention an appropriate balancing of support and challenge as the primary attribute of the developmental instruction provided.

Of course support and challenge in a general way are a part of many educational and counseling philosophies. Sanford (1967) mentions the concept in his description of the university's role in promoting the growth of the individual; as well, counseling theorists such as Lazarus (1971), Beck (1976), and Minuchin (1981) have employed the concept. General statements of care and concern for the student/client and general exhortations to work hard on their problems are certainly common. In the context of the Perry model simultaneously offering support and challenge entails providing support around the individual's established level of functioning, while challenging him/her towards the more complex construal process of the next level. For example, it is suggested that a dualist requires more structure (i.e., support) than a relativist and that such a person will reject or misconstrue (fail to assimilate, and fail to utilize are other

phrases, each having somewhat different implications) excess diversity (i.e., challenge). A dualist does require an appropriate amount of diversity, however, as a challenge to his concrete, absolutist manner of relating to the world. For example, one could provide support (structure) by means of a syllabus with specified assignments and due dates; while providing diversity (challenge) by means of a range of contradictory ideas in the course content.

Other examples of challenge include discussion, role playing, field trips, and interviews. These certainly allow the possibility of interacting with new ideas contradictory to one's own and with old ideas in new contexts, though they do not insure it. For example, some university instructors like to break their class into small non-directed discussion groups. Much can be gained in such sessions if the participants place some value on the reflections of others and the contexts in which the reflections are based. However, the basic dualist (Position 1) is likely to see these as a waste of time--such a person wants information from the authority. Yet, providing such groups with the support of (authoritative) structured discussion questions may be enough to gain a dualist's participation and eventually a reconstrual of the exercise as one in which one is expected to find the right answer by one's own independent thought (Position 2, Multiplicity Pre-legitimate).

Whether Perry's model is sufficiently refined to offer

precise guidelines for the construction of such a programme at each of the positions remains to be seen. In education examples published to date (see Touchton et al., 1977, for example) the programs usually fit nicely with the broad categories of the model, but are not refined to the narrower positions. Furthermore, the programs are not particularly distinguishable from programs developed on the basis of educational philosophies uninformed by Perry.

A Counseling Application

Most of the published counseling applications of the Perry model have centered on the utility of the scheme as a model of career decision-making (Knefelkamp & Slepitza, 1976; Touchton, Wertheimer, & Cornfeld, 1977; Wiley & Viesar, 1979). Knefelkamp and Slepitza (1976), from their experiences in career counseling, noted that certain dimensions appeared to differentiate among individuals with respect to their view of careers, with respect to their view of career counseling and with respect to their view of the career decision-making process. Specifically, they found that individuals varied on such dimensions as openness to alternative perspectives, ability to assume responsibility, locus of control, and ability to take risks with the self. Through their previous work with the Perry scheme (Knefelkamp, 1974; Widick et al., 1975), they conceptualized certain similarities between movement along the Perry continuum, and the developing sense of the career decision-making process they had noted in

their own observations. They used Perry's model as a heuristic for organizing their own ideas into a nine position model describing movement from a simplistic view of the career decision-making process to a more complex, pluralistic one. Thus, the form of Perry's positions remained intact and was extended to perceptions of the career decision-making process. In this adapted model dualism is characterized by simplistic, dichotomous thinking; for example, there is perceived to be only one right career and the individual relies on external influences such as counselors and interest inventories to define it. A major conceptual change occurs with relativism as the individual begins to perceive the legitimacy of a range of career choices and approaches to the decision-making process. Within these positions individuals become able to accept responsibility for an active role in the choice process. The final positions involve a comprehensive integration of "who and what they are with the style of their interaction with their environment" (Knefelkamp & Slepitza, 1976, p. 56). Career identity and self identity are more closely related, and "the individual's values, thoughts, and behaviors become more closely consistent with one another" (p. 56), at the same time remaining open to challenges.

Knefelkamp and Slepitza have been among those attempting to design developmental interventions based in the support/challenge concept and aimed at increased cognitive complexity. For example, they suggest structured workshops and handouts, didactic

counseling, and task-oriented career courses as appropriate techniques for promoting growth in dualists. Relativists, however, are seen as more independent of authority; thus, self-help career guides and individual and independent study are likely to be effective interventions (Wiley & Vieser, 1979).

Thus far, applications of the Perry model within the counseling area have been restricted to situations such as career counseling which lend themselves to an educational approach. Applications to other areas seem feasible though Knefelkamp and Slepitza have emphasized that one should not expect to apply the model exactly the same way in each area--contextual modifications will be necessary. Certainly the applications thus far have been heuristic in form with little attempt to evaluate the programs, and considerable additional work of this sort is necessary.

Problems Facing the Perry Model

At this time it is appropriate for the applications of Perry's model to be heuristic in form as a multitude of problems with respect to the model itself remain to be addressed by future research. The idea that dualistic and multiplistic thinking are steps towards a relativistic construal process rather than stable characteristics is philosophically compelling. However, a primary goal of future research must be the collection of data to evaluate this idea of a regular pattern of development. Such data will do much to clarify the construct which Perry has outlined. A more complete accounting of the pattern of cognitive

and behavioral characteristics associated with each of the nine positions is necessary. This accounting should consider both overt behavioral characteristics and cognitive characteristics such as problem solving strategies. Such research implies the need for the development of more refined measurement instruments as well. The work of Marcia Mentkowski is notable in this regard (Mentkowski, Moeser, & Strait, 1983; Mentkowski & Strait, 1983).

Of the positions Perry describes the commitment positions are least clearly described and are found to occur very rarely (Lawson, 1978). Kurfiss (1977) has suggested that Perry has actually confounded two dimensions in his scheme. At the lower positions the model seems to speak to intellectual development, while at the commitment levels the concern is with psychosocial identity development. These matters raise the issue of the relationship of the Perry model to other descriptions of adult development.

Loevinger (1976) has considered Perry briefly in relation to other models of psychosocial and moral development. Gilligan and Murphy (1979; Murphy & Gilligan, 1980) have discussed the relation of Perry's model to Kohlberg's model of moral judgment. They suggest that the ability to consider moral choices within contexts rather than as absolutes has a considerable effect on the outcome of those choices and the process of making them. Another issue is the relationship of Perry's positions to the Piaget stages of cognitive development. Many researchers are

interested currently in the possibility that there are cognitive stages beyond formal operations (Commons et al., 1984). One example is Michael Basseches (in press) who has investigated the development and use of dialectical schemata in adult thinking. These schemata represent a developing sense of various ways in which contradictory material and ideas developed in different contexts can be woven together in thinking. Jung (Jacobi, 1965) and Pascual-Leone (1983) have each discussed the development of dialectical thinking; interestingly neither describes this pattern of thought as developing so early as the traditional university years. For a more complete discussion of the relationship among the Perry model and other models of adult cognitive development see Irwin and Sheese (1984).

Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder (1961) have suggested that conceptual systems will vary from one content area to another, rather than exhibiting the generality across content implied by the term stage. Various researchers (e.g., Kurfiss, 1977) have found that the measured value of the Perry position varies with the content area addressed by the measurement instrument. Kurfiss hypothesizes that students are likely to advance first in those areas with which they are most persistently engaged. This advancement can be seen as functional adaptation to the demands of meaning construction in the face of increasing (and thus, eventually, conflicting) information in the area of engagement. Perhaps "the epistemological coping process by which individuals

come to terms with significant new meanings of new environments" (Griffith & Heffernan, 1978, p.11) is as follows:

1. In the absence of information about the area or situation one sets out to master the facts--operating (and, depending on the degree of previous experience, thinking) as though there is only right and wrong information.

2. As one assimilates more information conflicts inevitably arise. Though one may temporarily feel that the area allows almost any concept to be equally well supported, the experienced thinker moves quickly to a relativistic view--seeking to develop context sensitive concepts supported by the types of evidence judged most important for the issue at hand. (Less experienced thinkers who lack sufficient engagement with the area may retreat from the conflict, and frequent retreats will reduce the development opportunities.)

3. With increasing awareness of the range of conceptualizations possible within an area one begins to identify himself with certain of these and recognizes the value, limitations, and eventually, the necessity of conducting further explorations/investigations of the area from a point of view.

This description suggests that one proceeds through the nine positions not once, but in cycles across different areas or situations and that the nature of the cycling changes with experience. For his part Perry has avoided the term <u>stage</u> from the beginning and in a more recent article states,

> I do not know the geometrical name for a helix with an increasing radius, as for example a tornado. Let us suppose, however, that we take the present scheme and twist it round into such an expanding spiral in which it will be "more advanced" to be wrestling with Position 1 the second or third time around than with Position 9 the first time around. Then add to this the necessary "horizontal decalage." I'm sure the metaphor will give a better fit and that this is the kind of theory we must learn to use.

The implications of this more elaborate model include that educators and counselors should not assume that their students and clients are naive with respect to the higher positions. Rather the likelihood of relativistic construing will vary in accordance with the individual's prior experience in the environment. In addition the model carries the hopeful implication that each time a student succeeds in advancing his level of construal in one environment there is a positive effect on the general process which will subsequently apply in other environments. An implication for researchers is that measurement instruments must be designed so as to tap thinking with respect to a number of environments.[1]

Research to date has involved only university and college students. One must ask about the generality of these phenomena outside the academic situation. This question should be part of an attempt to evaluate the processes which underlie the

development which Perry has described and the experiences which promote it. The following tentative formulations suggest one direction in which such an investigation might proceed. Within the intellectual culture generally and the academic setting specifically students daily encounter models of relativistic thinking and commitment in relativism. In fact these forms of thinking could be considered as among the most important values of the intellectual culture. Though students frequently misconstrue the ideas presented by the models there are generally clear indications to the student that these misconstruals have occurred. To the extent that a student desires to accommodate to the values of the culture these indications foster a state of uncertainty/incongruity/challenge which can provide the impetus to develop the skills (executive schemes in cognitive processing terminology) necessary to maintain engagement in the face of conflict such as described in item 2 above. Together the models and the engagement encourage students to coordinate more complex systems of information. Skill in the co-ordination process develops and even more complex structures are built, eventually leading to changes in the way knowledge is construed.

From this point of view the insight offered by Perry's work might be phrased in the following way. The movement into the intellectual culture is a slow one. Along the way novices misconstrue the tasks and advice given by their elders. There are regularities to be found in these misconstruals and by being

sensitive to them one can reconstrue the misconstruals and the acts (cognitive and behavioral) which follow from them. Rather than viewing them as evidence that the initiate is an inappropriate candidate for one's efforts, one can view them as normal and necessary, and examine them for evidence of movement towards the eventual goal. Such a view allows us, teachers and counselors alike, to take heart that our efforts are not so impotent as they sometimes seem, that with persistence our common goals can be achieved. Whether such optimism has a warrant in the research around the Perry model will be a continuing question of interest as that research proceeds.

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Appendix

Developmental Stages of Thought and Value Forms	Comments Typical of Positions
The Positions of the Perry Scheme of Development	
I. DUALISM	
1. Basic Duality	Position 1
World is viewed in polarities of right/wrong, we/they, good/bad. Knowledge and values are Authority-bound.	Authorities know, and if we work hard, read every word, and learn Right Answers, all will be well.
	Transition
	But what about those Others I hear about? And different opinions? And Uncertainties? Some of our own Authorities disagree with each other or don't seem to know, and some give us problems instead of Answers.
2. Multiplicity Pre-legitimate	Position 2
Diversity is perceived in the world, but is accounted for as unwarranted confusion or poorly-qualified Authority.	True Authorities must be Right, the others are frauds. We remain Right. Others must be different and Wrong. Good Authorities give us problems so we can learn to find the Right Answer by our own independent thought.
	Transition
	But even Good Authorities admit they don't know all the answers <u>yet</u>!
3. Multiplicity Subordinate	Position 3
Diversity and uncertainty are perceived as extensive, but only temporary conditions.	Then some uncertainties and different opinions are real and legitimate <u>temporarily</u>, even for Authorities. They're working on them to get to the Truth.
	Transition
	But there are <u>so many</u> things they don't know the Answers to! And they won't for a long time.

Note: The left column is taken from Griffith & Hefferman (1978). The right column in taken from Perry (1981).

Developmental Stages of Thought and Value Forms	Comments Typical of Positions
The Positions of the Perry Scheme of Development	
II. RELATIVISM	
4. Multiplicity Correlate: Relativism Subordinate	Position 4a
Legitimate uncertainty, diversity and frames of reference other than Authority's are seen as extensive and non-temporary.	Where Authorities don't know the Right Answers, everyone has a right to his own opinion; no one is wrong.'
	Transition
	But some of my friends ask me to support my opinions with facts and reasons. (and/or)
	Transition
	Then what right have They to grade us? About what?
	Position 4b
	In certain courses Authorities are not asking for the Right Answer; They want us to <u>think</u> about things in a certain way, <u>supporting</u> opinion with data. That's what they grade us on.
	Transition
	But this "way" seems to <u>work</u> in most courses, and even outside them.
5. Relativism Correlate, Competing or Diffuse	Position 5
All knowledge and values (including Authority's) are seen as contextual and relativistic. Dualism is subordinated to a special case.	Then <u>all</u> thinking must be like this, even for Them. Everything is relative but not equally valid. You have to understand how each context works. Theories are not Truth but metaphors to interpret data with. You have to think about your thinking.

	Transition
	But if everything is relative, am I relative too? How can I know I'm making the Right Choice?
6. Commitment Foreseen	Position 6
The need is felt to orient oneself in a relativistic world through some form of affirmation, direction or Commitment, (not simply a blind opposition nor a submission to Authority).	I see I'm going to have to make my own decisions in an uncertain world with no one to tell me I'm Right.
	Transition
	I'm lost if I don't. When I decide on my career (or marriage or values) everything will straighten out.

Note: The left column is taken from Griffith & Hefferman (1978). The right column in taken from Perry (1981).

Developmental Stages of Thought and Value Forms	Comments Typical of Positions
The Positions of the Perry Scheme of Development	
III. COMMITMENT	
7. Initial Commitment	Position 7
An affirmation or choice is made, a direction is established in some area.	Well, I've made my first Commitment!
	Transition
	Why didn't that settle everything?
8. Orientation in Implications of Commitment	Position 8
Implications of one's choice, direction are experienced. Subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility are explored.	I've made several commitments. I've got to balance them--how many, how deep? How certain, how tentative?
	Transition
	Things are getting contradictory. I can't make logical sense out of life's dilemmas.
9. Developing Commitments	Position 9
Affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities evolves. Commitment experienced as an on-going, unfolding expression of personal values and life-style.	This is how life will be. I must be wholehearted while tentative, fight for my values yet respect others, believe my deepest values right yet be ready to learn. I see that I shall be retracing this whole journey over and over--but, I hope, more wisely.

Note: The left column is taken from Griffith & Hefferman (1978). The right column in taken from Perry (1981).

Footnotes

[1]Cornfeld and Knefelkamp (1977) found a sample of graduate students to be no higher within the Perry model than a sample of advanced undergraduates. On the surface this result would seem to call Perry's developmental notion into question. However, this result might be considered to be in line with the more elaborate version of the Perry model if one thinks of the graduate students as coming to terms with a new environment. This interpretation would be bolstered if it were known that the measuring instrument encouraged discussion of the new environment.